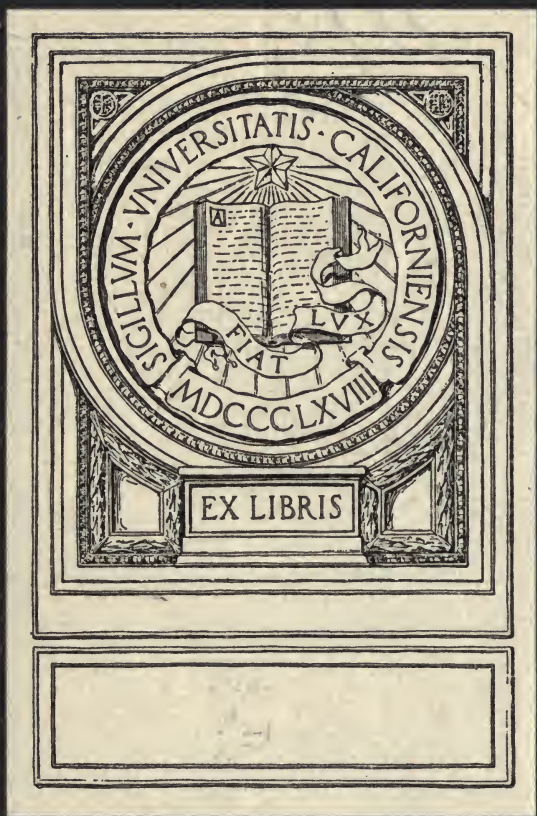


D
509
P3
70.5

UC-NRLF



B 4 074 805



EX LIBRIS

The Decisive Hour Is It Lost?

By

J. H. OLDHAM, M.A.

Price Twopence

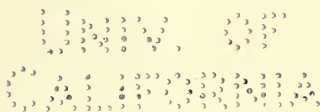
HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE BOMBAY

PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 5

THE DECISIVE HOUR:
IS IT LOST?

BY

J. H. OLDHAM, M.A.



HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE BOMBAY

1914

II 509
P 3
no. 5

EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuries have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

WHEN in days to come men try to understand the significance of the Great War, they will seek to interpret it in its bearing not merely upon the nations engaged in the struggle, but upon the spiritual destinies of mankind as a whole. Even amid the absorbing excitement of the struggle for national existence, this larger point of view must not be forgotten. For Christians especially, who own a loyalty to a Kingdom wider and more enduring than any earthly empire, no question strikes deeper than the question how the war will affect the growth of the Kingdom of God.

I

Four years ago a book was published entitled *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*.¹ Its main argument was that the peoples of Asia and Africa are at the present time passing through a renaissance more remarkable and far-reaching than the movement which changed mediaeval into modern Europe ; that their entire political, economic, social, intellectual, and religious life is in process of recon-

¹ A revised edition will shortly be published by Messrs. Nelson in their shilling series of reprints of copyright books.

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

struction ; that their ancient faiths, standards, and social systems are proving insufficient to meet the demands of the new time ; and that the question of all questions for the Christian Church is whether in the present hour of crisis and of destiny it can give to these peoples a spiritual faith, to be the strength and inspiration of the new world which they are setting out to build.

The same view as to the decisive nature of the present opportunity was taken by the World Missionary Conference that met at Edinburgh in 1910. In words which in the light of recent events seem prophetic, it affirmed the critical importance of the next few years in determining the spiritual evolution of mankind. ' If those years are wasted,' it declared, ' havoc may be wrought that centuries are not able to repair. On the other hand, if they are rightly used, they may be among the most glorious in Christian history.'

Such statements have been criticized as extravagant and feverish. Every generation, it is said, is apt to have an exaggerated notion of the particular tasks which it is called to undertake. And yet history supplies abundant evidence that there are tides in the affairs of men ; that real crises occur in the life of nations and of the Church as well as of individual men ; and that when they arise, life or death may depend on the capacity of the individual or the nation or the Church to recognize and to meet them. The belief that the present time is of critical importance in the spiritual history of the non-Christian peoples rests upon a solid basis of facts ; and if the Church is too preoccupied, or has not sufficient insight, to grasp the meaning of these facts, the spiritual loss to the world will be great and inevitable.

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

Japan, which is taking part in the war as one of the Great Powers, has gained its position with such astonishing rapidity that its present Prime Minister has witnessed the transformation from the beginning, and played a leading part in bringing it about. Three years ago the establishment of a Republic in China revealed to the world what revolutionary forces were seething in that ancient and populous nation. There are many proofs that in both Japan and China leading men are aware that the roots of national greatness lie not in material progress but in the character of the people, and that they are deeply concerned to find a spiritual basis for the new national life. What faith and what ideals will mould the thought and engage the affections of the peoples of the Far East ? The new order that is steadily and surely taking shape must rest on some body of beliefs. Can the traditional religions provide the needful foundation ? If they prove insufficient, shall we witness the growth of powerful civilizations based on a hard and soulless materialism ? Or shall the east know in its growth, as the west has known, the vitalizing, renewing, sanctifying influence of Christ ? The march of history has seldom given rise to questions of greater moment for the human race.

In India we witness the same unrest. The political agitation of which so much has been heard in recent years is only one symptom of a national awakening, which is expressing itself in manifold gropings after a higher life. In what moulds will this surging life be cast ? Will it express itself merely in some new system of thought that will take its place with the ancient Indian philosophies as a fresh monument to the powers of the Indian mind ? Or is it the Divine purpose that the strange contact for a brief

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

span in its long history between India and a people of the west should be the means of planting in Indian experience a seed of truth from which will spring a fairer and richer harvest than anything that India is able herself to give to the world ? While this deep question waits for answer, the Indian mission field presents another problem of peculiar urgency. The depressed classes, fifty millions in number, which have been kept outside the pale of Hindu society, are reaching out their hands towards a religion that offers them a larger hope and opportunity. The Christian Church might receive them in hundreds of thousands, or, as some believe, in millions, if it had the resources to teach and to shepherd those admitted into its fellowship.

The contact with western civilization which has set these mighty forces in motion among the more advanced peoples of Asia has affected, in ways different but no less direct, the primitive and backward races of the world. These peoples have everywhere passed under the tutelage of western nations. New forces have broken in upon the child-races of Africa and the islands of the Pacific, shattering the restraints and supports of tribal life, and bringing new temptations and dangers which the people have little power to withstand. The western nations have assumed a responsibility the magnitude of which is as yet little understood. Stupendous and untiring efforts to protect and to educate the backward races are necessary, if they are to be saved from a state of demoralization and servitude that will be a cancer in the social life of the west.

To these tasks must be added that of bringing the Christian message to the Moslem world. The task is one

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

which, since the days when Islam in its first onset won for itself the lands where Christianity had obtained its earliest triumphs, the Church has never possessed the courage and faith seriously to attempt. It gains a wholly new urgency in the light of the profound changes that within the past few years have taken place among Moslem peoples. It is immeasurably harder to accomplish because of the age-long antagonisms and antipathies between Christendom and Islam. But it cannot be refused except at the cost of denying that Christ is the Light and the Life of the World.

It was before such opportunities as these that Christian Europe stood at the beginning of the year of grace 1914. When the imagination is allowed to clothe the bare facts with the warmth and colour that truly belong to them, they bring before the mind a field for the noblest heroism and the most splendid achievement. All the lavish sacrifice of life and of wealth that the war has called forth might have been poured into these great tasks. It would have borne an abundant and rich harvest in the education of the more backward races to take their true place in the human family and to make their proper contribution to its well-being and happiness. In the effort to communicate to others the secret of its own deepest and truest life, Christendom might have experienced within itself the quickening of undreamed-of powers.

From all this Europe has turned aside. We find ourselves in the presence of a great tragedy. The favoured nations of the west, when in the slow movement of history they were brought into a position of special opportunity and responsibility in relation to the non-Christian races, failed to recognize their appointed

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

mission, and allowed their energies to be diverted from constructive effort and helpful service to the waste and desolation of war.

II

How much has been lost ? There is, in the first place, the waste of life and wealth. The finest manhood of Europe is being sacrificed without stint. The best men, so urgently needed for the higher work of the world, will in days to come be sadly fewer in number. Hundreds of thousands of children will have to grow up without a father's guidance and care. Europe will emerge from the war with a crushing debt about its neck. The whole world will be poorer, and whatever work has to be done will need to be done with greatly diminished resources.

The clash of arms has invaded many parts of the mission field. In Togo, Kamerun, German South-West Africa, British South Africa, Rhodesia, German East Africa, and British East Africa, in the German possessions in the South Seas, and in the Shantung Peninsula in China there has been fighting. In India the work of German missions has been subjected to restrictions and interruption. The unsettled conditions in the Turkish Empire have brought about a general dislocation of missionary work, and at the time of writing it is uncertain whether Turkey may not be involved in the war. The admirable missions of the Paris Evangelical Society are suffering heavily through lack of funds. There is at present no means of estimating more exactly the extent of the interruption to missionary work, or how far its effects are likely to be permanent. But it is evident that the disturbance affects a large part of the mission field. Where congregations have been scattered, schools closed, and workers dismissed, it will

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

not be easy after the war to repair the damage. If colonies ultimately pass from one European Power to another, the difficulty will be greatly increased. When the Christian Church at the close of the war surveys afresh its missionary task, it will find itself confronted not only with the necessity of maintaining its existing work and with new calls of peculiar urgency, but with widespread losses that will have to be made good.

The missionary cause is seriously weakened by the estrangement between the German and British peoples. These had much to give to one another in the common service of the world. The importance of the German contribution to missionary work has received increasing recognition in Anglo-Saxon countries since the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. The international committees which have been engaged during the past few years in extensive investigations of missionary problems have come more and more to appreciate the thoroughness, penetration, and painstaking industry of their German members. The German contribution was beginning to leaven and enrich the whole work of missions. All this happy and profitable fellowship has for an indefinite period been brought to an end.

The spectacle of peoples which bear the name of Christ seeking to tear one another to pieces cannot but be a shock to the faith of the Church in the mission field and a stumbling-block to thoughtful non-Christians. It may be that the actual harm will be less than might naturally be expected. For the stumbling-block is of long standing. The outbreak of hostilities is not so much a new and perplexing ailment as a patent and unmistakable symptom of a long-established and deep-seated disease. The

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

greatest hindrance to missionary work has always been that Christendom has been manifestly so little Christian. It may even prove a gain that the cancer in the vitals of western civilization has been so nakedly revealed. But though good may in the end come out of evil, the open and startling contradiction between the scenes we are now witnessing and the spirit of Christ cannot fail to create perplexities for the peoples to whom Christianity is being offered as a basis upon which to build their new national life. Do the western nations believe in the creed which they profess ? Can the Christian ethic be applied to the real problems of life ? Is there such a thing as the Church of Christ, when Christians everywhere appear at the crucial test to find national loyalty a more powerful tie than the sense of their unity with their fellow-believers in the Body of Christ ? To these and other like questions the missionary will find it harder than before to give a satisfying answer.

Thus, at a time when every circumstance seemed to call for a new, large, and deliberate advance in the evangelization of the non-Christian world, the Church has to face far-reaching disturbance of her work, a serious diminution of the material resources upon which she can draw, and estrangement and division between those who ought to be fellow-workers in the furtherance of the Kingdom of Christ. Is the loss irreparable ? Must generations pass before the missed opportunity can be regained ? Or are there still possibilities of recovery and restoration ?

III

The God revealed in the Bible is a God who causes waters to break forth in the wilderness and the desert to blossom as the rose ; who commands the winds and the waves, and

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

rides upon the storm ; who can make even the wrath of man to turn to His praise. The faith of the Hebrew prophets was able to see in the conquering hosts of the heathen monarch Cyrus an instrument for the accomplishment of the Divine will. We are thus reminded that God is able to overrule what to our eyes appears an overwhelming catastrophe, and make it contribute to the fulfilment of His purpose. It may be that the Christian peoples of Europe were not fit instruments for the evangelization of the non-Christian world, and that they needed to be purified and disciplined by suffering. It may be for our good that there should be a removal of the things that can be shaken, if in the end the things that cannot be shaken stand forth more firm and clear. The deeps have opened, but there is no cause for fear. It is in the heart of great experiences that God is most surely to be found.

Already, as we can humbly and thankfully recognize, the war has been the means of quickening forces of good as well as of evil. Our people have experienced as seldom before in their history the beat and throb of a mighty common purpose. In the unity and strength of that common purpose they have found themselves lifted to new heights of life. It would be a calamity if the nation, when the war is over, were to sink back to the old levels. If the quickening of life, which has meant so much to us, is to continue and increase, men must have set before them some redeeming and ennobling task. May not the Christian service of the peoples of Asia and Africa furnish such a task ? The love of country, which the war has kindled to so intense a flame, is a sentiment to which in its highest and purest form an appeal may be made in the name of

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

Christ. In the clear light of His life and teaching, the standard of greatness is service. The highest glory of any country lies in what it has done for mankind. If, therefore, men gladly give their lives to preserve their national heritage and to save the spiritual fabric which their fathers reared from vanishing from the earth, may not the same love, deepened and ennobled by Christ, impel them to toil and suffer in order that their people may attain the utmost greatness in service ? Never, it would seem, has the heart and mind of Great Britain been more prepared for a strong and convincing appeal on behalf of Christian missions.

The war has taught us the meaning and the power of sacrifice. Thousands of men have been found ready to die for their country. The British Empire lives only through the blood which they have gladly shed. A world that was flooded with writing and with talk, that was playing with speculations and programmes, that was in danger of surrendering its soul to material things, has been awakened to the realities of life. The old truths of duty and loyalty and sacrifice have again proved themselves to be the bread of heaven by which men and nations live. Can the generation that has seen the clouds and mists disperse and these mountain peaks stand out in their beauty and grandeur allow the vision to fade from its eyes ? Will those who have learned the strength of sacrifice and service again allow false gods to have dominion over them ? The brave who have fallen will have done greater service than they knew if, through the example of their deaths, their people turn again with true repentance and a new devotion and love to the strong Son of God, who, as the author and perfecter of those

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

that follow in His steps, laid down His life for the redemption of the world.

A great religious awakening and revival would make the material losses caused by the war of little account. The people of this country, as of all countries, will be poorer after the war, but this will not necessarily diminish the resources available for missionary work. It is not in times of national prosperity and ease that money flows in greatest abundance to the support of good causes. Sometimes it is in days of adversity that men's hearts are most open to the claims of the eternal, and that they are found most ready to give largely to the work of God. The readiness to make large sacrifices that the nation has shown in the time of war is a virtue which at Christ's call may find no less striking expression in the service of His Kingdom. It will be possible to maintain the work of missions only at the cost of larger sacrifices than before, but by the grace of God those sacrifices can be made.

The war has helped to make clearer the fundamental antagonism between the Christian ideal and the attitudes and practices which have prevailed in western Christendom. God has stripped the veil of delusion from men's eyes. The selfishness that has infected so much of our social, industrial, and national life stands revealed in its true character and inevitable consequences. In the reign of this selfish spirit the Church of Christ has too easily acquiesced. If the shock of the war should awaken the Church to a new appreciation of the Gospel with which it has been put in trust for the world, the advantage to the cause of missions will be incalculable. The missionary witness of the Church has been seriously prejudiced by the unchristian character of social and national life in the

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

west, and by the absence of an adequate and unequivocally Christian protest. A truly penitent and converted Church will find itself possessed of undreamed-of powers for missionary service. In missionary work in the past there has been a temptation to proceed, in practice, on the assumption that the primary requirements are more missionaries, more money, and better organization. We may yet learn to our encouragement how much more potent than any of these things is the moral power of the naked truth, clearly exhibited and intensely believed.

The work of Christian missions has a necessary place in the ideal for society which earnest men everywhere desire to see substituted for the false conception of human relations in which the war has its roots. The only way to end war is to bring about a radical change in ideas. War will become impossible when men realize that nationality is a gift to be used in the service of the world, and that the different nations are necessary to one another. Christian missions are in their nature and aims an expression of this truth. They are an embodiment of the idea that the stronger and more advanced peoples are meant to help the weaker and more backward. The importance of their work will receive increasing recognition, as the ideal of human brotherhood takes a firmer hold on the minds of men. For this ideal has its only sure foundation in the Fatherhood of God which Christ revealed, and the power to achieve it is found in His Gospel.

The difficulties of the situation may be the means of bringing about a larger measure of unity in the Church of Christ. The experience of the mission field shows that the result of a great calamity, such as the Boxer uprising in China, has often been to draw the missions

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

closer together and to lead to reconstruction on better lines. One of the most striking results of the outbreak of the present war was that each of the nations in the hour of its destiny knew itself one. May not the Christian Church, in a new apprehension of the magnitude of the task to which it is called, attain a larger, deeper unity ?

Thus through the dark clouds we can see bright rays of hope. Our eyes have been opened to new possibilities. But they are as yet no more than possibilities. If the decisive hour in missionary work is to mean not defeat but victory, a spiritual warfare has to be waged no less exacting than the conflict on the battlefields of Europe. The awful experiences of the struggle for national existence help us to understand the reality of the fight in which the spiritual destinies of the human race are at stake. Success in this warfare demands no less fortitude, perseverance, endurance, and devotion than victory in the war against Germany. Does the Church understand this ? Is she prepared to accept the conditions ? She will surely be willing, if in the secret place of meditation and prayer she allows God to reveal afresh to her heart the captivating vision of the Kingdom of God. If our country, with all its faults, can command such devotion as we are witnessing in these days, has not the cause of Christ, with all its promise of peace and joy and strength for mankind, the power to evoke a yet more ardent loyalty ?

The ultimate and real ground of confidence in the success of Christian missions has not been shaken. Missionary work has always been a sublime adventure. It would be the most foolish of undertakings, if it did not rest on the immutable purpose of God. For the accom-

THE DECISIVE HOUR : IS IT LOST ?

plishment of that purpose all the resources of His omnipotence are pledged. The assurance has been given in the death and resurrection of Christ. What are the outward losses of the present time in comparison with the infinite resources of God, ' who makes the dead alive, and calls into being what does not exist ' ? All His energies go out to bring healing and repair. Amid the fury of the storm He bids us look up and see in the heavens the unchanging lights of His goodness and truth, of the tenderness and pity of His Father's heart. Each morning His voice calls us anew to help Him in His purpose to save, strengthen, and sanctify human life. The only thing that can bring about failure is that men will not open their minds wide enough to the sweep of His purpose, and believe sufficiently in His power to bring it to pass. The answer to the question whether the decisive hour has been lost is the putting of another question : ' When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth ? '

NOTE.—A few sentences in this paper have already appeared in an article which was published in the October number of the *International Review of Missions*.

PAPERS FOR WAR TIME

Published under the auspices of a Group drawn from various Christian bodies and political parties, the editor-in-chief of the series being the Rev. W. TEMPLE, M.A.

Already Published.

1. CHRISTIANITY AND WAR. By the Rev. W. TEMPLE, M.A.
2. ARE WE WORTH FIGHTING FOR? By the Rev. RICHARD ROBERTS.
3. THE WOMAN'S PART. By Mrs. LUKE PAGET.
4. BROTHERS ALL: THE WAR AND THE RACE QUESTION. By EDWYN BEVAN, M.A.

Published on Nov. 16.

5. THE DECISIVE HOUR: IS IT LOST? By J. H. OLDHAM, M.A.
6. ACTIVE SERVICE: THE SHARE OF THE NON-COMBATANT. By the Rev. W. R. MALTBY.

Ready on Nov. 30.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT IN WAR TIME. By W. H. MOBERLY, M.A.

THE WAR SPIRIT IN OUR HOME LIFE. By the Rev. A. HERRERT GRAY, M.A.

Two papers will be issued each fortnight: among those in preparation are the following:

THE REAL WAR. By the Rev. W. E. ORCHARD, D.D.

THE CHURCH'S OPPORTUNITY. By HENRY T. HODGKIN, M.A., M.B.

THE ANSWER TO BERNHARDI. By the Rev. Professor D. S. CAIRNS, D.D.

GAYLORD BROS
MAKERS
SYRACUSE - N.Y.
PAT. MAR. 27, 1907

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



051131947

300534 P3

509
705

Papers

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

